

**Failing Boys : Poor Achievement and the  
Construction of Masculinity of Six Indian Boys in  
a Secondary School in Chatsworth, Durban**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Manimagalay Maduray, declare that this is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

\_\_\_\_\_

Durban on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2004

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I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my loving family for making this study a reality.

To my husband George, thank you for encouraging me to grow and for giving me space when I needed it.

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## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to two very important women in my life, my mother, **MEENATCHEE MOODLEY** and my mother-in-law, **ASODHIE VAILU**.

To my mother, to whom I will be forever thankful for keeping our family together despite all the difficulties we endured. Thank you for all the sacrifices you made and for inspiring me to reach greater heights.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project investigates the ways in which six Indian boys who have been officially proclaimed failures in grade 11 construct their masculinity in Meadowlands Secondary School, a predominantly Indian technical secondary school in a working class area of Chatsworth. The way in which failing Indian boys construct their masculinity is under-researched in South Africa. When boys are officially declared academic failures by the school, they often take other ways to validate their masculine identities. This study focused on the complex relationship between their academic failure and the formation of their masculinities.

Drawing from semi-structured in-depth interviews with six boys who failed grade 11 in 2003 and are currently repeating grade 11 in 2004, the study shows the complex relationship between school failure, and the formation of boys' masculinities in three areas. These areas are the formal academic dimension of schooling, the informal social dimension of schooling and outside school activities.

The major findings from the interviews indicate that boys construct their masculinity by resisting the demands placed on them in schools and engage in disruptive activities. They find alternate power and prestige in wearing brand name clothes, wearing jewellery, carrying cellular phones, having girlfriends, clubbing, taking drugs and joining gangs. They find school boring and equate academic achievement with being feminine and thus being gay and resist doing school-work. They are thus able to construct their masculinities in ways that are anti-school and anti-authority.

The study concludes by suggesting that failing boys at MSS are in trouble and that schools and teachers must be more alert to why failing boys behave in the ways that they do. At MSS it is suggested that the school encourages the development of sport as a way of exposing boys to different ways of being a boy.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In many countries boys have come to public attention because they are slipping behind girls in terms of educational performance. Boys have traditionally been seen as better than girls with the innate capacity to succeed in schooling. Nevertheless, some boys are failing. This realization has become an international concern (Epstein et al., 1999). Several researchers have argued that boys have struggled as a result of major changes in society. Arnot, Davis and Weiner (1999) in the UK argue that shift in the patterns of male employment and the skills demanded are changing. Boys' ways of expressing masculinities have become less compatible with the gaining of educational qualifications (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). The relationship between boys, masculinities and schooling is complex and any understanding of boys' academic failure must consider the relationship between schooling and masculinities.

This small-scale study investigates the relationship between school failure and masculinities at a predominantly Indian secondary school in Chatsworth, Durban.

There appears to be very little research and debate on the achievement of boys in South African schools although Truscott (1994) notes that the education system in South Africa treats females differently from males. An exception in the South African literature on boys and achievement, is Morrell's position that "the growing realization that boys are battling at school should not be taken lightly ... these are seen as symptoms of crisis" (1998: 220). Very little else exists in the South African literature on masculinities and achievement.

Research in Australia has indicated that from a historical perspective, boys have always 'underachieved' and more importantly, this underachievement has never been seriously addressed, or neither has underachievement been treated as a problem of boys. Epstein et al. (1999: 27) state that boys have a "breezy attitude to life... that successfully secures him from morbid concentration on the acquisition of



knowledge”. Noble and Bradford (2000: 15) also state, “some boys don’t work as hard as most girls. They tend to be lazier, less motivated, less organized, poor presenters and less eager to please.” In considering the declining academic performance of boys therefore, certain issues of masculinity, which are important to teachers, need to be considered, such as, the construction of ‘boys’ power, male sexuality, construction of masculinities and reinforcing dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Bleach, 2000).

This study investigates the ways in which poor-achieving boys actively construct, manage and negotiate their masculinity. Schools “have often been seen as masculinity-making devices ... Schools do not simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys or femininity among girls. They are agents in the matter, constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations” (Connell, 1989).

The data in this study is derived from semi-structured interviews with six boys who failed grade 11 in 2003 and are currently repeating grade 11 in 2004 at Meadowlands Secondary School (MSS) in Chatsworth, Durban. These boys have been formally proclaimed failures by the school. Their poor status in the academic world of schooling encourages them to take up alternative resources to validate their masculine identities. The study does not intend to focus on what form hegemonic masculinity takes in MSS rather the intentions are quite specifically geared to understanding the masculinities of failed boys.

The research site is Meadowlands Secondary School (MSS) a technical high school situated in Montford (Unit 7), Chatsworth. Chatsworth is a sprawling, predominantly Indian township created after the Group Areas Act was passed in 1950. It is divided into eleven units, and each unit is composed of semi-detached homes, flats and low cost houses for a lower income population. Chatsworth also includes homes for the middle class e.g. in Mobeni Heights (Unit Four), parts of Arena Park (Unit Six) and parts of Moorton (Unit Nine). The fluidity of economic power has meant that many people have extended their homes and built granny cottages that are let out on rent.

Later in this chapter a contextual description of the research site is provided. Meadowlands Secondary School offers a mainstream academic curriculum as well as

a trade curriculum. The trade curriculum is very popular and attracts a large number of boys from Chatsworth, as well as boys from the surrounding suburbs. This has resulted in far more boys (70%) and fewer girls (30%) in MSS.

## **1.1. MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

My interest in masculinities and boys' under achievement was aroused by the Gender and Curriculum module, which focused on their achievement and masculinity. I began questioning the reasons for high rates of failure amongst boys at MSS. According to Head (1999) there is a long established series of complaints about boys and their social behaviour, being disruptive in school, unreasonableness in the home, truancy and delinquency and more recently, underachievement in schoolwork. In this thesis, I have tried to understand this behaviour by referring to the literature on masculinities.

Masculinity is an important concept in the understanding of boys and achievement. Connell (1995:163) states that the school is a powerful agent in the making of masculinities. The making of masculinities is a process with multiple pathways, shaped by class, race and ethnicity. Chapter 2 provides further detail about the concept. At MSS, boys are battling at school. The exam schedule in 2003 illustrates that 25% of grade 11 boys failed. In 2004, 35% of the grade 11 boys failed. I chose grade 11 because the failure rate of boys in this grade is the highest. The increase in the failure rate suggests that this issue must not be taken lightly and is clearly an indication of a crisis in schooling in South Africa.

This thesis focuses on six grade 11 boys and examines the complex relationship between masculinities and their school learning. In my daily interactions with the under-achieving boys I have observed how they bullied and ridiculed each other, engaged in rule-breaking activities, insisted on wearing their shirts out of their pants although they were continuously reprimanded, wore earrings, had fancy exotic hairstyles full of hair gel, whistled or catcalled at girls when they entered the class and picked on each other's girlfriends. It became evident that these boys were actually

displaying their masculinity and competing with each other, as they were jockeying for positions. It is important to understand how failing boys viewed this issue. Semi-structured interviews with six boys were conducted and analysed. The boy's ages range from seventeen to nineteen. A full description of the boys is provided in Chapter 3.

Francis (2000:2) contends that there is much confusion and contradiction in the literature surrounding boys underachievement. "Some argue that the 'crisis of masculinity' is lowering the confidence of boys so that they no longer have the motivation or confidence to achieve, whereas others maintain that it is boys' very complacency and over self-confidence that is causing the problems". Francis (2000:132) also alleges that the large body of literature with practical strategies and suggestions to combat underachievement can only make a superficial difference, "as they do not address one of the main underlying causes of boys' lesser educational success: the perpetuation of a laddish gender culture among school boys".

Martino and Meyenn (2001:2) state that there is a "moral panic" about boys' educational issues in the United Kingdom. Educational ministers have called for schools to challenge the laddish anti-learning culture that has been allowed to develop over recent years. This laddish anti-learning behaviour prevails at MSS therefore I decided to use this school as the research site.

In the sections that follow, I will introduce the school as a research site. MSS school is in the process of change. In 1994, MSS changed its character from a purely academic one to include trade subjects in keeping with the direction in which the country is heading. MSS is preparing the learners to enter directly into the job market. Most of the boys will not enroll at tertiary institutions. By doing a trade they can open and manage their own businesses

In the next section the social context of MSS is described. This will entail discussing the socio-economic, demographic and political factors that influence the nature of the school.

## **1.2 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT IN CHATSWORTH**

The huge suburban sprawl of Chatsworth lies about 20kms south west of Durban's Central Business District and 4kms from Durban International Airport. With about 300 000 residents, Chatsworth is quite literally a 'city within a city' which has a rich blend of culture despite the unavoidable effects of urbanization. Chatsworth was planned from 1960 and settled from 1964 and by 1980 consisted of 11 units having sub-economic and economic houses. Like all cities Chatsworth has a distinctive socio-economic division. The 'elite' areas stand out from their less fortunate neighbours and their homes are bigger and more expensive and the general surroundings are in tip-top condition.

Chatsworth came into being as a result of the Group Areas Act No.41 that was passed in 1950 in order to implement the policy of racial segregation. Chatsworth itself was created as a dumping ground for people classified as Indian by the apartheid system. Tens of thousands of Indians were forced to give up their lives in the areas they had called home and were packed off to the outer reaches of Durban. "Chatsworth was both a place and a struggle... Race and class, the old chestnuts, still loom large" (Desai, 2000).

With the abolishment of the Group Areas Act in 1991, an increasing number of African and Coloured people have moved into Chatsworth. Most of these people are concentrated in squatter camps that have mushroomed in vacant and unused spaces in Chatsworth.

Chatsworth started off as a low-income area and although people in some areas have become more economically affluent, it remains a working class society with working class ethics... Chatsworth is plagued by social distress. The unemployment rate in Chatsworth is over 50%. Historically a large number of men and women in Chatsworth found work in clothing and textiles industries. As these industries started to shed labour, it was the men who went first. Many men became reliant on their wives' wages... Many women have opted to be single mothers, often ostracized by the family and the community, rather than to put up with the abuse and exploitation of

their male partners... The economic and social distress of the youth draws them into gangsterism (Hamlall, 2004).

### **1.3 SOCIAL CONTEXT:**

#### **MEADOWLANDS SECONDARY SCHOOL**

MSS was opened in 1969 to only Indian learners and was one of the few high schools in Chatsworth at that time. A purely academic curriculum was offered and learners were restricted in their choice of subjects and grades. After the country's first democratic elections in 1994 learners of all race groups were admitted to the school. The learner population consists of Indians, Blacks and Coloureds. There are no white learners or educators at this school since all the learners are from Chatsworth and the surrounding areas.

According to the EMIS statistics as at March 2004, the school has 70% boys and 30% girls. Of the 70% boys, 82% are Indian, 14% Blacks and 4% Coloureds. 10% of the boys have lost their fathers and 20% live with their mothers who are single parents.

Therefore a large number of boys have very few or no male figures as role models, thus making the construction of masculinity very difficult. In a recent survey conducted by the Department of Education, 75% of the parents/guardians indicated that they wanted a state subsidy because of unemployment, low income or deceased parents.

The trade subjects offered at MSS are technika electronics, electronics, electricians work, fitting and turning, motor mechanics, motor body repair, plumbing and sheet metalwork and welding and metalworking. Only technika electronics is offered on the higher grade, all other trades are offered on the standard grade. This is significant because the trade subjects also have a practical component that makes passing easy. These trade subjects are very popular with the boys, although a few girls are breaking the barriers.

The other trade courses offered are hair care and beauty and cosmetology. These are national courses and only offered to girls. This year, however, one boy insisted on doing hair care. However, the beauty part of the course involves girls to remove some of their clothing for certain modules such as massaging and waxing. The boy was advised to take a transfer to a college. The other trade courses that are very popular amongst boys and girls are hotel keeping and catering, travel and tourism and computyping.

The fully equipped workshops provide the learners with an edge in the field of science and technology. Grade 11 learners go on a work experience program to have 'on the job' training to prepare them for the working world. Reports by their 'temporary employers' are used for continuous assessment purposes. Having two fully equipped computer rooms with the latest hardware and software, MSS enrolls the highest number of computer candidates in the province.

The academic curriculum offers subjects like Biology, Physical science, Computer studies, Technical Drawing, Accounting, Business Economics and Geography thus allowing students to pursue a career in engineering, medicine, law, social sciences and in the commercial fields. Students completing their matriculation examination are at a distinct advantage. The options available to them are entry into:

- 1) a technical college at N4 level.
- 2) a teacher training college.
- 3) a technikon at national certificate level.
- 4) industry through apprenticeship training contracts.

This introductory chapter explains the focus of my study, that is the focus on six boys who have been proclaimed officially as failures. In this chapter I have described the research site, the context of Chatsworth and the context of the school and explained my motivation for this study.

Chapter 2 will focus on the literature on how race and class influences the construction of masculinity in schools and how this impacts on the boys'

performance. As a result of the paucity in local research on this issue I will draw upon international studies on masculinities, performance and achievement.

Chapter 3 describes the research problem, research design and problems and limitations associated with the research. The research process was conducted using interviews to determine the link between failing boys and the construction of masculinities.

Chapter 4 deals with the analysis and findings of the research process.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion based on the research on masculinities and its influence on the performance of boys as well as some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study investigates the ways in which poor-achieving working class boys actively construct, manage and negotiate their masculinity. Connell (1989) argues that students, when formally proclaimed failures by the school, take up alternative resources to validate their masculine identities. This study is an attempt to understand the ways in which boys negotiate the relationship between their failed status and masculine identities.

In this chapter the following areas will be highlighted:

- The boys debate and achievement which will include a brief discussion of the following areas: the ‘poor boys’ discourse; the ‘boys will be boys’ discourse and the ‘failing schools’ discourse,
- Construction of masculinities,
- Race, class, masculinity and achievement.

It is important to note that this chapter relies heavily on the international research. The paucity of research in South Africa regarding masculinity and achievement is most evident. While this orientation is not the most ideal situation, it clearly suggests why this thesis is important in addressing the gap in research in South Africa.

#### **2.1 THE BOYS DEBATE AND ACHIEVEMENT**

There appears to be very little research on the achievement of boys and girls in South African schools, and although Truscott (1994:41) mentions that the “education system treats females differently from males”, she focuses more on the structures in place in schools, like the curriculum, for example, that sustain gender differences which



unfairly advantage boys rather than girls, but does not compare academic achievement. Morrell's work on masculinities and schooling in South Africa has not focused on achievement and gender. In the absence of literature in South Africa this study relies on work done elsewhere on boys and achievement to make sense of the failing boys at MSS. At the same time it must be acknowledged that local conditions are important in exploring the masculinities at MSS. Research conducted elsewhere is helpful but local conditions are vital in understanding the specific nature of masculinities at MSS.

In Britain there is a great concern about the 'crisis of masculinity' because there is an increased awareness that boys have shown a relative lack of improvement at GCSE level compared with girls. The concern with masculinity has found its particular expression in the field of education in a debate on 'boys' under achievement (Francis, 2000: 2). The media's reasons for the 'gender gap' were the 'new lad' culture, a lack of positive role models, the nature of assessment, and a general 'blaming' discourse directed at girls and women teachers (Renold, 2001: 370).

However not all girls are achieving and many boys continue to excel at GCSE level. Factors such as social class, ethnicity and stereotypically gendered patterns in subject choices also affect achievement (Francis, 2000:12). When the media drew attention to the girls' academic improvement, reasons were sought to explain boys educational 'failure', which Epstein et al. (1999:6) categorized as the "'poor boys' discourse, the 'boys will be boys' discourse and the 'failing schools' discourse". These are elaborated below.

### 2.1.1 THE 'POOR BOYS' DISCOURSE

The 'poor boys' discourse locates boys as being disempowered victims of the schooling system and blames their underperformance on the influence of females, like their mother, female teachers, girls and feminists (Epstein et al., 1999; Francis, 2000). Epstein et al. observes how schools become areas where the domination of female teachers control and stifle boys. They see this matriarchal influence as emasculating for boys because it results in boys losing control of their own lives and subsequently

of their male power (Epstein et al., 1999). Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), in their study, argue that boys' inability to conform to the expected notions of masculine behavior, disadvantage boys and contributes to their poor academic performance.

Cohen (1998) cited by Francis (2000:10) states that the low educational achievement among boys has historically tended to be seen as the result of external faults, such as the teacher, school, or method of learning or assessment. Hence many government and academic initiatives to improve boys' educational achievement are built on the supposition that boys' comparative underachievement is a result of a failure to make education sufficiently appealing to boys.

The rhetoric about 'boys as victims' has a seductive but dangerous influence in its capacity to reinforce the very versions of masculinity that need to be challenged in schools. This is why it is crucial to explore ways of working with boys in schools to encourage them to interrogate how they perform and define their masculinities. They can construct their masculinity in a positive way instead of being aggressive and destructive (Martino & Meyenn, 2001: 82).

### 2.1.2 THE 'BOYS WILL BE BOYS' DISCOURSE

The 'boys will be boys' discourse, which is similar to the 'poor boys' discourse, locates boys as being biologically inclined to behave in a certain manner (Epstein et al., 1999). This discourse regards stereotypically male behavior, for example, aggression, displays of physical strength and boisterousness, as natural boys' behavior (Bleach, 2000).

The discourse also recognizes the importance of boys' heterosexuality. As a result, the 'boys will be boys' discourse suggests that teaching methods and the education system in general, fail to address the needs of boys. What is viewed as their disruption and subsequent underachievement in the classroom is in fact the normal way for boys to interact, and therefore effective strategies need to be implemented to maintain boys interests (Bleach, 2000; Epstein et al., 1999).

### 2.1.3 THE 'FAILING SCHOOLS' DISCOURSE

On the other hand, the 'failing schools' discourse is concerned with how schools fail to address the needs of boys. Strategies that address 'school effectiveness' and 'school improvement' are seen as ways to improve both the educational standards of the school, and the academic performance of boys. Mac an Ghaill (1994:56) in his study called the boys who 'survived against authoritarianism' from the school authority 'Macho Lads'. These boys were in the bottom two sets for all subjects. Their shared view of the school was of a system of hostile authority and meaningless work demands. Teachers and students saw them as the most visible anti-school male sub-culture. " 'Looking after your mates', 'acting tough', 'having a laugh', 'looking smart' and 'having a good time' were key social practices" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994:56).

In schools, peer group masculine identities develop in response to the school's differentiated forms of authority. "This was highly visible in relation to the Macho Lads' experience of the school's social relations of domination, alienation and infantilism that were mediated through their location in the lowest sets. These social relations were of central importance in the construction of their masculinity through conflict with the institutional authority of the school" (Mac an Ghaill, 1994:58).

None of these explanations are useful in explaining the construction of masculinities in relation to boys' achievement. They are discredited because " it seemed that 'one of the dominant notions of masculinity' in many schools is, indeed, the avoidance of academic work (or the appearance of working)" (Epstein et al, 1999).

## 2.2 CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES

The literature on masculinities points to the ways in which masculinity is socially constructed, as something men achieve rather than are born with, and which embodies a set of beliefs that men possess in terms of gender identity (Connell, 1995). Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) demonstrate that masculinity is not a bundle of character traits or social roles which are learned during childhood and adolescence, and which are fixed. Rather they argue that masculinity is a performance or 'doing gender

work'. The important point here is that masculinity is never fixed but fluid and changing. In addition, Connell (1987; 1995) points to the fact that different kinds of masculinities are evident in particular social contexts and that within the social contexts there are variable masculinities. The social location thus points to important variables in the form and shape of masculinity.

At schools there is an "interplay between gender, race and class and it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities: black as well as white, working class as well as middle class" (Connell, 1995: 76). Connell (1995) offers four main categories in which western men construct their masculinity – hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalization. It must be noted that this is a small-scale study and does not engage with the forms of hegemonic masculinity at MSS but it is important to understand hegemonic masculinity as it impacts on boys in this study.

The concept 'hegemonic' refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. Hegemonic masculinity guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige, and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend by earning a greater income than women. Men are also more likely to have more power, in the home and in the workplace. The continuing assumption that male values and lifestyles represent the norm is illustrated in examples such as the lack of childcare provision in the British workplace. Further, gender roles in the family apparently remain largely unchanged, since women continue to perform the lion's share of housework and take care of their children (often in addition to their paid work) (Francis, 2000).

Subordinate masculinity is linked with femininity and is therefore the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity. Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous type of subordinate masculinity. Homosexual men are subjected to abuse, violence, discrimination and boycotts. Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men (Connell, 1995:78). Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy. They are referred to as wimps, nerds, sissies, geeks and dweebs (Connell, 1995:78).

Connell (1995:79) identifies the third type of masculinity as complicit masculinity because the number of men actually practicing hegemonic masculinity is small, yet the majority of men gain from it's hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women without the tension and risks involved. However, Connell also argues that a great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers and are never violent towards women.

The interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities. Connell (1995:80) refers to the relations between masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups as 'marginalisation'. Marginalisation is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Francis (2000) suggests that being viewed as 'not masculine' results in boys being marginalized and ridiculed by their peers. However the dominance of any group of men may change when they are challenged or contested by women. Hegemony is therefore a mobile relationship and is not fixed.

### **2.3 MASCULINITIES, SCHOOLING AND ACHIEVEMENT**

The literature of masculinities and schooling point to the school "as important in the shaping of modern masculinities among boys" (Connell, 1996: 51) Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Epstein, Elwood, Hey and Maw (1998:97) suggest that many constructions of masculinity in schools, including versions that involve engaging in 'resistance' to schooling. Boys reject academic work because it is perceived as being 'feminine' which is associated with being gay. If this is true then "schools will need to focus on masculinity as an issue in and of itself and, in particular, on the deleterious effects of misogyny and heterosexism" (Epstein et al; 1999:97).

Renold's (2001, 369) research into boys' schooling cultures has also illustrated the

feminisation of male academic success. Many boys equate high achievement and academic study with femininity or as something that 'girls do'. Being 'clever' is often interpreted as an absence of an overt subscription to dominant modes of masculinity. Renold (2001) sites Mac an Ghail's (1994) 'academic achievers' as being 'effeminate', and consequently bullied because of their perceived masculine 'lack' and investment in non-hegemonic versions of masculinity.

This view is shared by Lesko (2000). She believes that the impact of the school on the development of heterosexuality is crucial to understand adolescent behaviour and gender identity. Lesko (2000: 77) states that adolescents are pressured to adhere to conventional gender roles and there is a "culturation of homophobia, misogyny and male dominance. Through adolescents' voices we demonstrate how these forces become status quo for compulsory heterosexuality and gender identity in their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors".

Mac an Gail (1994), in his study of an English comprehensive school, explores the ways in which gender power is structured and perpetuated and how gender identities are constructed in an environment which is shaped by a wide range of forces, including state policy, teacher practices and peer pressures. He believes that three major elements of hegemonic masculinity in schools as misogyny, homophobia and hegemonic masculinity is entrenched and enacted in school. He defines the compulsory heterosexuality. Hegemonic masculinity is also associated with toughness, power and competitiveness and the subordination of gay men (Connell, 1995: 77). "Boys often construct and display their knowledge of masculinity through adopting a position of hegemonic masculinity: through playing the fool, engaging in anti-social behaviour and adopting an anti-school, anti-learning stance" (Maynard, 2002)

Epstein *et al* (1999) cites Mohony (1989) who argues that when a boy gets 'pushed around', it is not because he is a boy but because he is not the right sort of boy. He is perceived as possessing qualities that run counter to dominant notions of masculinity. He may be subjected to verbal abuse; 'poof', 'queer' and 'you've got AIDS'. For him the lesson to be learnt is how to become a real man, dominant, and not subordinate.

## **2.4 RACE, CLASS, MASCULINITY AND ACHIEVEMENT**

Understanding the ways in which boys manage, negotiate and construct their masculinity is complicated by the fact that masculinities are racialised and expressed through class positions (Frosh et al, 2002). It is therefore impossible to generalize about the experiences of boys as they negotiate their social contexts. Social class and race impact on the ways in which masculinity is constructed. It is important to note that MSS is predominantly Indian (84%). Only 14% of the learner population is Black and 02% are coloured.

Often working-class and disaffected students are kept apart from high achievers to prevent them from being distracted (Paechter, 1998)

“... the great thing is to show to the working class the real dignity of labour..... and to let them feel that is far nobler thing to be the head of an engineers shop, or to be a first-rate joiner, or a good mason, than it is to be a poor clerk who has to contend against the frightful competition which exists in the class, and who must appear respectable on the narrowest possible means.”

Penfold (1988) as cited by Paechter (1998).

Home economics and craft and design technology were subjects that were used as instruments of social reform and control of the working-class students. Physical education also had a role in promoting and perpetuating forms of working-class masculinity that are associated with working with and on the body. These areas have traditionally been targeted as ‘less academic’ (Paechter.1998).

In schools there is a wide range of voices, reflecting differences not just of gender, but also of ‘race’, social class and ‘ability’. Massive unemployment and urban poverty now powerfully interact with institutional racism in the shaping of black masculinity (Paechter, 1998). Sewell (1998:xii) believes that it is in school that ideas of sexual/racial ‘desire’, ‘fear’ and ‘internalization’ have most subtly been played and these

racialized/ sexual discourses influence both academic and social performance of African – Caribbean boys. He believes that the school, through its institutions and teacher attitudes supported by peer group cultures, acts as an agency for racialized/ sexual oppression. “ Race remains a vitally important part of contemporary life and politics, but it is neither separate from other factors (class, gender, sexuality, disability) nor is it always the most important characteristic in human experience and action” (Sewell, 1998: xiii).

The road to failure is clearly part of the culture and lifestyle of boys. Sewell (1998:4) describes an incident about a new fifth form Jamaican boy who obtained a C, but in the sixth form he couldn't do his 'A' levels. “ He had fallen back – right into the groove of the kids around him”. Mac an Ghaill (1998) talks of the overall rejection of schooling by the Rasta Heads:

One aspect of the visibility of the Rasta Heads was their overt rejection of the work discipline of the curriculum. But also of significance were the more subtle strategies of resistance that they had developed in their refusal to participate in the 'hidden rules' of classroom interaction. They rejected what Jackson (1968) describes as the unofficial three R's – rules, routines and regulations – that students must learn if they are to be successful at school.

A number of researchers have suggested that the discourse of boys' underachievement and concern with negligible gender differences in achievement actually hide far more substantial differences in achievement according to race and (particularly) social class. It seems that social class remains the most likely factor to affect one's educational achievement. Ethnicity also continues to have an impact, with the achievement of young people from different ethnic groups varying quite dramatically.

However international research cannot simply be duplicated in the South African context. Sewell (1997) states that Asian boys study hard, aim for good grades and most of them go to universities. They look weedier and are passive, therefore they are



easier to bully and are victims of Africa-Caribbean aggression. Mac and Ghail (1996) and Connolly (1998) in their research also found Indian boys to be studious. However my studies are in a different social context and in a country where failure is rife and therefore it is important not to homogenise the experiences of Indian/Asian boys. In contrast, at MSS it is largely the Indian boys who display aggressive, anti-social behaviour. They are lazy and show no commitment to their school - work.

In Renold's (2001) study, two-thirds of the boys ('working' and 'middle class') went to great lengths to avoid studious behaviours, particularly boys who were deemed high achievers. Some boys' deployed humorous techniques (including teasing and ridiculing of others) and some boys engaged in disruptive, 'rule breaking' behaviours. Others played down their achievements. Each strategy was a means of concealing conformist attitudes to schooling and to avoid being positioned as studious.

Some researches have suggested that pejorative narratives explaining boys' underachievement in terms of 'problem boys' are actually veiled attacks on working-class boys, because this is where such male educational 'failure' is located (Griffin, 1998 as cited by Francis, 2000). Francis (2000:11) also states that under the front page headline 'Failing Boys "Public Burden Number One"', Chris Woodhead (Chief Inspector of Schools), maintained in the *Times Educational Supplement* that boys' underachievement is one of the most disturbing problems currently facing the educational system (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1998).

In South Africa, the unemployment rate is very high and some commentators "suggest that working-class school boys now have less incentive to work hard because of the shortage of manual jobs on leaving school, and that this may to some extent explain their underachievement at school" (Francis, 2000:7). This argument seems slightly curious, as one could equally suppose that the lack of manual jobs not requiring qualifications could provide such boys with a greater incentive to achieve in order to access jobs requiring qualification.

The literature reviewed in this chapter illustrates that schools act as 'masculinity making devices'. In the process of constructing their masculinity, some boys have become anti-school, anti-work and anti-authority. However "it has to be emphasized

that schools do not exist on their own as locations for the creation and contestation of masculinities; rather, they complexly interrelate with other social and cultural sites ...” (Mac an Ghaill, 1996:59).

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The literature reviewed above clearly illustrates the relationship between the construction of masculinity, especially hegemonic masculinity and the underachievement of boys. In this chapter I discussed:

1. the boys’ debate and achievement, which included the ‘poor boys’ discourse, the ‘boys will be boys’ discourse and the ‘failing schools’ discourse.
2. the constructions of masculinities and
3. race, class, masculinity and achievement.

In the next chapter I will discuss my research methodology.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study attempts to investigate the intersection between the construction of working class masculinities and failing boys at MSS and shows how young boys, masculinity and poor achievement interact. Drawing on what boys say about this issue, this study sets out to illustrate how the construction of working-class masculinity operates to shape and form a disposition towards schooling. Six boys who failed grade 11 in 2003 and are now repeating the grade in 2004 formed the sample of this study.

#### **3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The poor pass rate in grades 10 and 11 is a serious issue at MSS. Since 70 percent of the learner population is made up of adolescent boys, the construction of masculinity and its effects on academic achievement is significant.

I chose grade 11 boys because the failure rate in this grade is very high. I also noted that these students were always getting into trouble with the school administration, were involved in tribunals and were being suspended. The boys' attendance is poor and when they do come to school, they want to do their work quickly (if they do their work), and don't care about neatness and presentation. They do not do their homework. They prefer to be noisy, boisterous, disruptive, disrespectful and destructive. They write with felt-tipped pens and tippex (which have been banned at my school) on the benches, desks, stools and walls. "All of this has worrying implications for teacher time, energies and school resources, as well as the classroom time the boys in question are losing" (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996:104).

Many of the boys I teach also abscond classes because “it is ‘cool’ to be anti-school and reject the academic system”(Mac an Ghaill, 1998). Bleach (2000:13) in his study found that the boys who still want to work “are branded as ‘swots’, ‘boffins’ or ‘keenos’”. I sometimes observe a battle being waged on the faces of the boys who do come to class because they want to be in the class but they also want to be outside with their friends. These boys often appear more concerned with preserving an image of reluctant involvement or disengagement. It is not acceptable for them to be seen to be interested in, or stimulated by academic work.

The school deals with behavioral problems by setting up tribunals with the parents and the disciplinary committee. At the tribunal many learners (boys and girls) are given warnings, suspensions and community work as punishment. Some are given transfer cards. The school also invites guest speakers to give motivational talks to encourage learners to improve their performance and to dispel their feelings of helplessness and despair. However, from the literature review, I am more alert to the ways in which poor performance and disruptive behaviour is associated with the construction of their masculinities.

My primary research question is:

1. What is the relationship between boys’ failure at school and the construction of masculinities amongst grade 11 boys at Meadowlands Secondary School?

### **3.3 RESEARCH SITE**

My research site was MSS. MSS is a large technical high school in Chatsworth where 70% of the learners are males and only 30% are female. Most of the boys come to MSS to specialize in a trade. There are forty-two educators, of which nineteen are female. There is only one Black educator and the rest are Indian. The school is on the brink of major changes. Being a technical high school, MSS is preparing for the Further Education and Training Phase, scheduled to be implemented in 2006. There will be a change in the curriculum. Learners will have to choose seven learning areas instead of the usual six subjects. English, Afrikaans, Mathematics/ Mathematics

Literacy and Life Orientation will be compulsory subjects. There will be no external matriculation examination in 2008 and greater emphasis will be placed on continuous assessment.

Most of the children attending MSS come from Chatsworth and the surrounding areas therefore most of the pupils are Indian and come from working class families. Most of the boys come to MSS to specialize in a trade. Many of the girls come to specialize in Haircare and Beauty. These girls are very popular with the boys. Therefore a large number of adolescent boys have to compete with one another to impress a small number of girls. In my capacity as Acting Head of the Science Department and as a senior teacher I was alerted to the fact that a large number of boys were underachieving. Many boys were unruly and disruptive and were always getting into trouble with school administration. Management therefore spent many hours sorting out discipline problems instead of doing administration work. My research site is therefore apt for my study.

In the next section I will discuss my research design.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

I used the qualitative research methodology in this study. Qualitative research is defined as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. In this study method, the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998: 15).

Qualitative researches believe that human experience cannot be quantified numerically. Since the construction of masculinity is a complex issue that cannot be expressed in numerical terms, qualitative research methodology was employed for the purposes of this study. Qualitative studies, then, will typically use qualitative methods of gaining access to research subjects. The chief method employed in this study was interviews.

In qualitative research methodology, the language of the subjects is important. This implies that the “actual words of the subjects are thought to be critical to the process of conveying the meaning systems of the participants which eventually become the results or findings of the research” (Filstead, 1979: 37). The ‘variables’ in a qualitative study are usually not controlled because it is exactly this freedom and natural development of action and representation that the interviewer wishes to capture. We want to understand, and also explain in argument, by using evidence from the data and from the literature, what the phenomenon or phenomena that we are studying are about. The analytical instrument is largely the researcher. Her knowledge, understanding and expertise will determine what happens to the data. (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004: 6).

Therefore, whatever subjects say (during interviews) is crucial since it allows the researcher to discover whatever is important and meaningful to the subjects in the study. “The researcher is unequivocally the main instrument of research and makes meanings from her engagement in the project – meaning that she will present as findings what she has interpreted to be the meaning of the data”(Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004:7). These findings are then discussed, and conclusions/implications for the study are drawn.

### **3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.5.1 SAMPLE SIZE**

To obtain my sample I checked the previous year’s (2003) schedules. The schedules contain the composite academic performance of all the learners in the school. The schedules state the number of learners that passed, failed and condoned each grade. Forty-four boys had failed the grade 11 examinations. Only 31 boys returned to school this year. From the class lists, in grade order (A-F) I selected every fifth boy to be part of my sample. I requested permission from the participants. I informed them that the interview was voluntary and they had the right to decline to answer any

question they were not comfortable with. Two of the boys did not want to be interviewed, so I selected the next boy on the list. Six boys were selected altogether. It was an easy and convenient number to work with. I also noted that no girls failed grade 11. Only boys failed and all the boys that failed were Indian. My sample therefore consisted only of Indian boys and they were given pseudonyms. Their names will be indicated with an asterisk (\*).

### 3.5.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

\*Virosh is the first boy I interviewed. \*Virosh is 19 and should have finished grade 12 but he also repeated grade 10. His parents are divorced and he lives with his maternal grandmother in Chatsworth. His father who is remarried with one child lives in the South Coast. His father does not visit and he has no idea where his father works. His mother is also remarried with one child and lives in Phoenix. She works in a shoe factory. She visits him and his little brother about twice a year. \*Virosh is very happy living with his grandmother who is his legal guardian. She receives a grant for him and his little brother. His grandmother is a housewife and his grandfather is a tailor. His mother's brother who is married with one child also lives with them.

\*Mark is 18 years old, and the second boy I interviewed. \*Mark's father is employed as a secretary for the Parks and Gardens and his mother is a housewife. He has a brother and sister younger than him. His mother's sister's daughter also lives with them because both her parents died in an accident. His parents have legally adopted her. \*Mark is happy that she is staying with them. He likes his family and has no problems at home.

\*Kumar is 18 years old. His father is a manager for Marquee, Tent and Tarpaulin Hire. His mother works for BMW as a machinist. She sews leather car seat covers. He has two older brothers. His eldest brother works for a furniture company. His older brother is studying Hotel Management at the Durban Institute of Technology. He works for Mr. Price, a retail store during the weekends. \*Kumar sometimes helps with housework. He can cook but only for himself. He is very happy with his family.

\*Rajen is 18 years old. His parents are unemployed. His father was a long distance truck driver but was retrenched. His mother used to work in a clothing factory but she was also retrenched. They used to run a tuck shop at their house but they had to close down because many tuck shops opened near his house and business was bad. He has an older brother who just qualified as a lawyer and he supports their family.

Nineteen year old \*Osman has an older sister and a younger brother. His father fixes washing machines and his mother is a housewife. His mother makes samoosa strips, which she sells to the neighbours to supplement the family income. His older sister is divorced and lives with them. She has two children who are in primary school. His parents support his sister because her husband is unemployed. \*Osman is not happy that his sister is staying with them because the house is “too noisy”. His younger brother is also at MSS. \*Osman sometimes helps his father during weekends.

\*Owen is 18 years old. His father died when he was three years old. His mother remarried and he has two younger brothers. He does not like his stepfather because he hits his mother. His stepfather is an alcoholic and is always losing his job. During the weekends his stepfather gets drunk and fights with the neighbours. \*Owen hates weekends. He goes to his paternal grandmother’s house in Phoenix during the weekends. His mother works in a clothing factory in Chatsworth. He likes his younger brothers who are in primary school.

In the next section I will describe the research method I used and give reasons for using this particular method.

### 3.5.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

I obtained permission from my principal to conduct the research. I also informed him that the schools’ name will be used but the learner’s names will be changed. He was very supportive and wished me every success in my research. I also obtained permission from the subject teachers to interview the boys. This support was a major factor in facilitating access to the boys. I also made a special request to management not to put me on relief on the days of the interviews. I allocated 40 minutes for each interview. However, in some cases, this time limit was exceeded. On the days of the



interviews I dressed casually (and not formally in my suits as I usually do) because I did not want to appear threatening to the boys. I sat on a stool opposite the boys and not in front as I normally do.

During the interview I tried to be the interviewer and not an educator, however this was very difficult. The process of interviewing takes place between two or more people who are unequal in power and in ownership of the process. The ownership of the interview is primarily the privilege of the interviewer- unless she relinquishes her power and invites the participants to be an equal co-director of the process (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004: 66). The weakness of this situation was that I still represented authority and the boys are anti-authority. The boys addressed me as 'ma'am', which meant that they still regarded me as a teacher in the school and not as a researcher from a university. The strength was that most of the boys were comfortable with me. I was not a stranger and they were able to be honest.

#### 3.5.4 INTERVIEWS

I chose the research interview method which is one of the many types of interviews, "all of which assume that the individual's perspective is an important part of the fabric of society and of our joint knowledge of social processes and of the human condition" (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004: 50). I know from experience that boys do not like to sit and fill in questionnaires. They prefer talking to writing. The interview method was therefore used to gather data to determine how the boys constructed their masculinity and how this impacted on their academic performance. An interview is "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data" (Kvale, 1996:11).

Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses "the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 265).

I chose to interview the boys individually because I realized that group dynamics affect the way in which masculinities are constructed in groups and individually. I felt that groups will affect what boys say as their performance of masculinity will be shaped by other boys. I then proceeded to set up dates for the interviews. The interviews took place in the science laboratory (my base room). They are familiar with the room and the room is quiet and private. The interviews were done during my free periods. The boys did not want to be interviewed after school because they have special taxis that take them home.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. An interview schedule was used to allow for flexibility and unanticipated responses from participants. During the semi-structured interview, the researcher introduces the topic on the interview, asks pertinent questions and follows up new leads depending on the interviewees' responses to his or her questions. The interviewees have to describe their experiences in their own words and terms. The questions included the following:

1. Do you like to present a 'macho' image to your friends and the girls at school?
2. How do you dress to create this 'macho' image?
3. How do you behave to create this image?
4. Do you like to disrupt classes? What do you do to cause the disruption?
5. Why do you do this?
6. What do you do after school?
7. Were you involved in any problems at school that resulted in a tribunal?
8. What was your punishment?
9. What career would you like to pursue after grade 12?
10. Do you think the school is preparing you adequately for your career?
11. Are you optimistic about your future?
12. Do your friends easily influence you?
13. Why do you like to wear jewellery?
14. Do you belong to any gangs?
15. Do you take drugs?
16. Do you go clubbing?
17. Do any boys call you 'gay' or a 'wimp' or a 'dweeb'?

18. Do you refer to any boys as 'gay', 'wimp' or 'dweebs'? Can you describe these boys for me?
19. What is your attitude towards high achievers?
20. Do you like sports? What sport do you play?

The interview was conducted in a non-threatening manner. At the start of the interview I thanked the boys for agreeing to participate in my research. I briefly explained to them what the research was about. I guaranteed their confidentiality and anonymity and told them their names will be changed. I also told them there were no right or wrong answers but appealed to them to answer the questions as honestly as possible. Initially some boys were uneasy and hesitant but I reassured them that only I would know their true identity and no one else. One participant wanted to know whether his parents were going to read my research. He was very worried. I told him a copy will be available at the university library only but he will remain anonymous.

Once the boys gained confidence they became quite voluble. The same questions were asked to all the boys but I sometimes modified the questions and changed the sequence of the questions. I sometimes had to explain the questions or add to them. Some boys had to be encouraged to talk while others volunteered a lot of information. Sometimes I had to stop the boys and ask them whether they were telling me the truth because I could not believe what they told me. They insisted it was the truth.

In some instances I had to repeat the information given to me to other boys for verification. Fortunately I teach at the school so I could verify most of the information given to me. I live in a suburb close to Chatsworth and shop at the Chatsworth Centre. I frequent the same shops as the learners to shop for my four teenage children, so I knew that the participants were being honest.

Henning et al (2004: 57) believe that researches who interview participants are “co-constructors of the meaning (the data), whether they intend to be or not”. When the researcher encourages the respondent to continue, he/she is interested in the line of thought and wants to pursue it. “There is a dialogic communicative action here... the interviewer yields the control – even in an open ended interview. And this control is a discursive act. It means something” (Ibid, 58). The researcher tried not to look

surprised or shocked (although on occasions this was difficult) to prevent offending the interviewee.

Kvale (1996) states that taping an interview gives the interviewer the opportunity to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview. However I felt that the tape recorder was an intrusion. When I first began with the interviews one boy questioned me about the tape recorder. In order to make the boys feel more comfortable I took down notes. These notes form the central part of the data in Chapter 4.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

Since a qualitative method to collect the data was used, the data analysis was interpretive. This is not a completely accurate representation but is “more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 299).

The data was interpreted and culled because it is impossible to report all the data collected. The selected information was condensed and further note taking and writing was done after the interviews. The relationships between the various categories were noted.

### **3.7 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS**

In this study there were several problems. In this section the problems associated with doing interviews are highlighted. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:268) state that “No matter how hard an interviewer may try to be systematic and objective, the constraints of everyday life will be a part of whatever interpersonal transactions she initiates”.

One of the problems I encountered was the use of the tape recorder. For the first interview I placed the tape recorder on the bench. The interviewee appeared overwhelmed. He kept looking at the tape recorder. After a while I quietly placed the tape recorder on the floor. It was important for them to be comfortable and open and honest because the information they were giving me was very personal and of a sensitive nature. It was at this stage that I chose to use note taking instead of using the tape recorder.

Some boys avoided answering some questions directly – they skirted around the issue. Some boys were not honest in their answers especially when asked about disrupting classes. They squirmed and fidgeted in their seats because they knew that I knew their teachers. I told them not to reveal the teachers name and reassured them they will remain anonymous. Thereafter they were very happy to tell me how and why they disrupt their classes. Sometimes asking the same questions over and over became quite tedious.

In some instances it was difficult to get the boys out of the classes during my free periods. Sometimes they were either writing class tests or watching films on their English set works. The interviews took place just before they wrote their third term tests that were set by the provincial department. Some boys were worried because the teachers were doing revision and they did not want to miss classes. Some boys however could not be found because they were bunking classes. I then had to look for another participant and valuable time was lost. It was therefore difficult to keep to the interview schedule.

Another problem I experienced was finding time to conduct the interviews. I could not use my lunch breaks because it was too short (20 minutes). Another important reason was that I am the chess coordinator at my school and the matches are played during the lunch break. I could not disappoint the children by canceling the matches. I have five free periods in a nine-day cycle. Although I requested not to be put on relief, it was sometimes difficult to accede to this request because of many teachers being absent. Teachers had to attend workshops, and during this period moderation was done in many subjects especially in grade twelve. Drawing up an interview schedule therefore became problematic. I had to tell the boys I will send for them whenever I

was available. Although I interviewed only six boys, the interview process became protracted because of the various contextual factors. In some instances 40 minutes was insufficient because some boys did not want to stop talking.

“In qualitative data, the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives, together contribute to a degree of bias. Validity then should be seen as a matter of degree rather than an absolute state” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). To minimize bias I sometimes reminded the interviewees to be honest. In some instances I repeated what the interviewees said in my own words to ensure that I had the correct interpretation. Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004:67) believe that the responses may be summarized with a different focus and therefore given a meaning other than what the respondent had intended with her (respondent) different worldview and knowledge base.

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that ethics is typically associated with morality as both deal with matters of right and wrong. The social scientific researcher must be aware of what is proper and what is improper conduct. The research ethic of no harm was upheld. The dignity and the welfare of the participants were considered at all times. I informed the principal about the research. I also informed him that the name of the school would be used. He had no objections. Before the interviews I clarified the nature of the research and the nature of the interviews. The interviewees were informed about the reason for the research. I assured them that all information obtained would be treated with the utmost confidence. I informed them that the name of the school will be used but they will remain anonymous and will be given pseudonyms. I conducted the interviews in a language that they were comfortable in and understood.

I also informed them that the research will be placed in the library and will therefore be available to the public. I assured them that there would be no possible harmful

consequences of the research data. I told them the information obtained would be beneficial because the educators will be able to have a better understanding of boys and their behaviour.

The consent of the boys was obtained verbally. I ensured that the interview was conducted in an appropriate, non-stressful and non-threatening manner. After the interview I thanked the boys for their time and for answering the questions honestly. I gave each boy a slab of chocolate to show my appreciation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDING AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates the ways in which poor-achieving boys actively construct, manage and negotiate their masculinity. The data in this chapter is derived from in-depth interviews with six boys who failed grade 11 in 2003 and are currently repeating grade 11 in 2004 at MSS. Connell (1989) argues that students, when formally proclaimed failures by the school, take up alternative resources to validate their masculine identities. One form of validating masculinity has been through resisting school demand and expectations (Frosh et al., 2002). By resisting school demands and expectations boys validate their masculine identities against the academic demands of schooling (Renold, 2001). Within the informal social aspects of schooling boys who are formally proclaimed as failures in the school, other forms of resources are used to validate their masculinity.

In this study boys impress their peers, other boys and girls by demonstrating access to capital including wearing high fashion clothes, jewellery and demonstrating ownership to the latest model of cellphones. Outside school activities included, engaging in clubbing, drugs and gangs and this provided further resources through which poor performing working-class boys could validate their masculinity.

This chapter presents the findings of in-depth interviews and shows the complex relationship between school failure, and the formation of boys' masculinities by examining the processes by which boys manage and negotiate their failure and their status as boys within three dimensions. These dimensions are:

1. formal academic dimension of schooling
2. informal social dimension of schooling,
3. outside school activities



## **4.2 NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC FAILURE IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **4.2.1 DISRUPTION IN THE CLASS: FUNNY SOUNDS AND LAUGHTER**

In this section boys' engagement in disruptive behaviour in the classroom is highlighted. Disruption in the classroom is an important part in the negotiation of masculinity. As other studies have shown being cool and resisting and challenging teacher's authority in the classroom by backchat was an important means through which high status could be constructed (Epstein et al, 1999; Frosh et al, 2002).

\*Osman does not like to come to school because there is "too much to learn" and he gets bored. He prefers "sleeping till late". He is not worried about the future because his parents will support him. At the moment he is only interested in "dressing up". When he does come to school he disrupts the class by making "funny sounds". He does not admit to making the sound. This impresses his friends and irritates the teachers. His friends start laughing. Sometimes the teacher "starts shouting at them" and refuses to teach.

The deployment of humorous techniques in this case making funny sounds in the classroom was an important strategy in disengaging from academic work and also from other boys who are regarded as hard working (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Popular hegemonic masculinity is constructed as being anti-school. Bleach (2000) shows how boys regard a studious approach to be 'unmanly'. By deploying funny sounds in the classroom, Osman seeks both the attention of the teacher and receives support from other boys and so validates his masculinity. Bleach (2000:2) states that boys "are less attentive in class, being more concerned with the 'laddish' traits of acting in a lively manner and having a good laugh."

\*Owen also makes noises and cracks jokes to disrupt the class. Renold (2001:374) believes that humour is a 'coping strategy' and 'an antidote' to schooling because learners are either bored or dissatisfied with school. Sometimes he tries to have an argument with the teacher. He whistles when girls walk pass the class or into the

class. This makes the teacher angry. \*Owen admits that his attitude towards his schoolwork has not changed although he is repeating the year. He does not know whether he is going to pass or fail. He wants to start learning but “there is too much to learn” and he “cannot concentrate”. He has “too many things” on his mind. He prefers drawing cars because he is “obsessed with cars”.

\*Owen does not enjoy schoolwork. However, he wants to start learning but he cannot concentrate. His interests do not correlate with schoolwork. Willis (1997) suggests that institutional interests are different from the interests of the working class therefore the resistance to schooling by the working class was the rejection of the legitimacy of school-sanctioned knowledge. The academic disciplines presented to the lads had no relevance for the type of jobs they wanted/expected to get. \* Rajen was disappointed because he is not computer literate and “most of the jobs are going to be computerized”. \*Owen does not get any prestige from learning, but he does get prestige from making fun in the classroom and whistling at girls, which explicitly defies the teacher’s authority while at the same time reinforcing heterosexual male dominance. He is not optimistic about the future. He believes that “today it is not about what you know but who you know”. He feels despondent because, “Blacks are getting the jobs”.

Many boys have felt brushed aside by this dominant definition of school knowledge because their everyday street knowledge experiences have been declared invalid (Epstein et al., 1999: 79). Epstein et al. (1999: 79-80) also state “social exclusion and academic rejection often entice ‘failed’ boys into a compensatory culture of aggressive laddism. An integral part of that culture is to view school learning as effeminized. Class and racial inequalities often erect barriers to learning but some boys also actively participate in their own underachievement by defiantly rejecting the school-approved, middle class culture of hard work by ironically associating it with an inferior wimpishness.

#### 4.2.2 HIGH ACHIEVERS: SHARP OU'S IN THE CLASSROOM.

The boys had no respect for high achievers who were constructed as wimpish. They are verbally abused and ridiculed. They call them names like “teachers pest” and “class boy”. \*Mark referred to them as “sharp ou’s”. \*Rajen called them “nerds”. \*Kumar remarked that these boys are always neatly attired in their school uniform and their shirt is always in their pants. They are the “butt of jokes” in class. If they give a wrong answer, everyone laughs at them and ridicules them.

Boys who were seen to be high achievers were derided. In line with other studies the boys in this study avoid studious behaviour and ridiculed high achievers who were constructed in a subordinate way (Renold, 2001). High achievers were mocked and teased and with the use of humorous techniques they were taunted because of their studious approach to schoolwork. They were scorned and taunted too if they got answers wrong. Their neatly attired school uniform opened high achievers to further ridicule.

Academically successful middle-class boys construct their masculinity through an emphasis on rationality and responsibility and are rewarded by a social power that gives them access to higher education (Connell, 1989). The reaction of the failed boys is a claim to other sources of power and other definitions of masculinity. Francis (2000: 98) in her study found that boys behaved ‘laddishly’ and avoided being seen to work hard at school to impress or maintain acceptance from their male friends and gain peer status. The boys behaved ‘laddishly’ because they wanted to appear ‘hard’ or ‘macho’. In this study too, boys associated high achievers with unmanly conduct.

#### 4.2.3 RELATING TO GAY BOYS

All the boys mentioned two grade eleven boys who were ‘gay’. According to the boys they were openly gay. The other boys tease them because of their effeminacy and lack of manly vigour. \*Owen said that he would not join them because he may end up gay. \*Rajen noticed that their shirt was always in their pants and they only joined girls. They talk, walk and act like girls. They are called the ‘G’boys. \*Kumar said

that a group of boys who act like girls are called the 'G' unit. Like the high achievers who are neatly attired, gay boys too are mal-aligned as a result of their neat attire, school rule abiding and their friendly (non-heterosexual desire) towards girls.

Dollimore (1991) as cited by Epstein et al (1999) points out that gay men and gay boys are constructed as 'the demonized abnormal other' to reinforce the normality and supposed 'natural' rightness of heterosexual men's behaviour. Homophobia pervades the culture of masculinity that is dominant in schools. It seems the linking of masculinity and homophobia may be associated with the harassment of non-macho and/or studious boys, at least in secondary schools" (Epstein et al., 1999: 102).

### **4.3 INFORMAL SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING**

In this section, the ways in which boys draw on other resources within the "informal" social dimension of schooling is explored. The Indian working-class boys in this study draw upon hegemonic forms of masculinity that include the complex demonstration of high fashion, jewellery, cellphones and heterosexual desirability.

Most of the boys interviewed spoke about the different ways in which they impress girls. Rajen alleged that, "everything they did, the dressing, the drinking, the swearing and the fighting was to impress the girls. In addition I found impressing girls was bound to the fashioning of the body. They do this by dressing in a certain way, wearing jewellery, carrying cell phones and by disrupting classes.

#### **4.3.1 DRESS**

The school has a dress code that is stated in the schools prospectus (Appendix I). All the role players in the governing body prepared the dress code. This included the student representatives. Every child in the school was given a free copy of the prospectus. If they lost the prospectus they had to buy a new one for ten rand. Anyone found defaulting with regard to uniform is given 20 demerits. This however does not serve as a deterrent to the way in which the boys dress. The need to impress is greater. Dressing therefore plays a pivotal role in the way boys at MSS construct their

masculinity. Francis (2000: 100) found that boys were more concerned with their 'image' than girls. Although the boys use school uniforms, the uniform is used as a powerful tool to impress the girls.

\*Rajen, \*Kumar and \*Virosh spoke about how boys "always like to be neat". By neat they meant their hair must be gelled and every strand must be in place. \*Rajen and \*Kumar spend fifteen minutes every morning in front of the mirror, ensuring that every curl is in place. \*Virosh spends ten minutes every morning separating his hair into little clumps. \*Virosh admitted that he comes late to school sometimes because "he has to set his hair". Neat also means that the tie must set properly on the collar and the shoes must be shining but that their shirts must be out of their pants.

When I mentioned that the shirt out of the pants looks untidy, \*Rajen replied, "The shirt out of the pants is to get into trouble with the teachers. We want the teachers to scold us in front of the girls so that the girls can be impressed". When I made the same comment to \*Kumar, he told me that "when your shirt is out, you appear strong, when your shirt is inside your pants, you look like a wimp". \*Osman mentioned that when some boys were asked to put their shirts into their pants, "instead of just tucking their shirts into their pants, they will open their pants to show the girls what boxers they were wearing". Sewell (2000: 220) states that boys contest their feelings of powerlessness "through phallocentric responses". He said that some 'fast' girls like this, but most of the girls do not like this. \*Owen said that the shirt cuffs "must be unbuttoned, it is part of 'the look'".

All the boys interviewed do not wear blazers to school. The boys preferred jerseys and jackets. Only school jerseys (plain 'V' neck navy blue or black) are allowed. Mark and Osman were wearing colourful jerseys. Rajen and Owen were wearing 'buffed up starter jackets' which is the current fashion. Rajen said that in the morning he puts his jacket in his bag and enters the school gates so that the guards or the teachers on duty will not see it. He wears it to some teachers' classes because others scold him or take it away. \*Owen had borrowed another boys jacket because he does not have one. He feels "great and strong with big muscles" with the jacket on. Wearing brand name clothes is a very important way in which boys at MSS construct their masculinity. I shall discuss this in the next section.

#### 4.3.1.1 BRAND NAME CLOTHES

Wearing brand name clothes make the boys feel rich, 'cool' and 'with it'. Dolby (2001: 65) holds that "While it is clear that taste may have been an important facet of identity, social structure, and scaffoldings of power... the use of global commodities and popular icons is used to define self..." The boys in this study do not 'mock or resist' mass culture but embrace it

\*Mark feels that "anything over R400.00 is worth it". The brand names the boys prefer are 'Billabong', 'Quicksilver', 'Levis', 'Soviet' and 'Diesel'. \*Osman prefers 'Sebago' or 'Rockport' shoes. He and his friends prefer shopping at certain shops in the Chatsworth Center, which is a shopping mall close to the school. The names of the shops are *American Menswear*, *Slam* and *Sports Scene*. \*Rajen believes that "if you see something good and if you wear it, you feel good". \*Kumar expanded, "clothing plays a part in attracting a women's attention. If she sees you wearing expensive clothes, she thinks you have a lot of money and will want to hook up with you".

\*Virosh feels that television programmes, especially Black comedy programmes, (sitcoms) influence the way boys dress and their attitude towards females. They copy their dressing and their hairstyles. In being proclaimed as school failures, these boys embrace popular commodities requiring fashionable style. These are working-class boys and increasing pressure is placed on parents to succumb to boys needs to dress to impress. Since some boys cannot afford brand name clothes they borrow from their friends. They pressure their parents to buy on credit.

#### 4.3.2 JEWELLERY

Wearing jewellery, especially earrings, is very popular with the boys at MSS. Boys are not allowed to wear earrings (Appendix 1), but maintaining an 'image' is more important than following the school rules. Some boys wear gold studs, some imitation diamond studs while others wear hoop earrings.

\*Kumar, \*Owen and \*Virosh had jewellery on. They believe it is 'cool' and part of the image to impress the girls as well as other boys. \*Virosh had imitation diamond stud earrings on. \*Kumar had a thick gold hand chain that belonged to his brother. He borrowed it without his brother's permission. He also had a gold slit that he did not need but he "wanted the gold slit because it looked cool". His father paid for it with his medical aid. He is very happy and he smiles more often now and the girls are impressed.

\*Owen had a gold chain around his collar setting on his tie and a big ring on his finger. He believes that, "if you approach a girl and from a distance she sees your jewellery, she is impressed".

Despite the working class contexts of these boys, it was important to demonstrate status through the wearing of branded clothes, looking good, wearing jewellery and impressing girls.

#### 4.3.3 CELLULAR PHONES

\*Rajen, \*Kumar and \*Mark have their own cell phones which they carry to school although it is against the rules. Carrying a cell phone makes them feel 'cool' and 'with the in crowd'. They love sending SMS's to their friends. \*Rajen said that he "can sit and play games on the cell phone the whole day". His cell phone also has a camera and a polyphonic ring tone. He got into trouble taking photographs of girls without their permission. He said that "you are 'it' if you have a Samsung E 600, you have to have the latest technology". He also uses the cell phone to download pictures from the Internet and show his friends. This makes him popular.

\*Mark's father gave him his old cell phone because he upgraded his. \*Mark and \*Kumar have cheap cell phones. It's what they can afford. The important fact is that they have a cell phone to impress the girls. They do not have a contract. They buy phone cards because it is cheaper. \*Mark admitted he uses the cell phone to disrupt classes and irritate the teachers. The cellphone is thus an important tool in demonstrating masculinity: an expensive cellphone provides high status. There are also levels at which status is ascribed: cheap cellphones compared to Samsung E600

and contract phones compared to phone cards. These boys must not be seen as monolithic. The variation in their working class positions is clearly demonstrated by access to the type of cellphone and the form and payment for calls.

Having a cellphone is also an important tool in the negotiation of heterosexual masculinity. \*Kumar said “when you ask a girl for her phone number, she expects you to take out your cell phone to take the number down, she does not expect you to take a pen and page and write the number down”.

Although the school is in an impoverished area, many pupils at MSS have cell phones. Cell phones are used to create an image. It provides the boys with high status.

#### 4.3.4 GIRLFRIENDS

Holland, Ramazanoglu & Sharpe (1993:1) point out “Heterosexual young men embark on sexual activities with women in social situations in which they must strive to become victorious gladiators in the sexual arena...” \*Owen and \*Osman have girlfriends in school. \*Rajen believes that boys have girlfriends to impress other boys. \*Kumar said “boys get pretty girls not because they like the girl, but because they want to have sex with the girl and tell the other boys and impress the other boys.” \*Virosh said, “Sex is a big thing in school. Boys are aware of AIDS – they use condoms. If they don’t have condoms, they don’t have sex but most of the boys carry condoms. The girls insist that the boys use condoms.” \*Virosh also said that girls have sex to impress other girls- they lost their virginity first – better than the other girls.

\*Mark believes that “some girls like you for who you are, some use you”. He said that boys like “touching the girls on their butts” and “holding the girls around the shoulder- the girls smile so the boys think they are enjoying it”. \*Kumar said that the boys know which girls to touch. They respect other girls.



\*Owen believes that he has “a sweet tongue” and he “charms the girls – whatever I tell them, they fall for it”. \*Osman said that he goes out with his girlfriend because “she has money and buys me expensive gifts”.

Sexuality is therefore a central site in men’s struggles to become masculine. Western sexuality produces some men as virile, romantic, successful and powerful and is characteristically competitive, aggressive and centers on men’s desires and men’s demonstration of potency (Holland et. al., 1993: 1)

#### 4.3.5 SPORT

Unfortunately, at MSS, sport is not a major extra-curricular activity. The school only plays interschool matches in soccer, netball, volleyball, table tennis and chess. The soccer co-coordinators wanted to organize an inter-class soccer tournament but the response was very poor and the tournament had to be cancelled. One would think that in a school where the majority of learners are boys, the response would be fantastic, but unfortunately this was not the case. The boys have other interests to pursue during the breaks.

None of the boys interviewed played sport but \*Rajen was a very good athlete. He very proudly told me that he won many medals at the schools annual athletic meeting. \*Owen believed that playing sports would make a difference because if the boys are good at soccer, “ the girls will fall for them”.

### 4.4 OUTSIDE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

As soon as \*Virosh goes home from school, he leaves his bags, dresses up and goes to the road. He says he comes to school for nothing because he does not do homework and bunks classes. \* Mark also spends most of his time on the road. He sits in his uncle’s tuck shop and plays games on the machines. He believes the tuck shop is a great distraction. Although his parents scold him and tell him to learn, he prefers

gambling. His father gives him twenty rand a week for washing their van and sometimes he receives twenty rand for cleaning the garden. He uses this money to play games.

Owen and his friends sit in groups after school in the shopping center. He feels that when you go home, “you don’t want to think about schoolwork, you only want to be with your friends”. The friends influence each other to do things and they talk about girls. He believes that girls are not allowed freedom; therefore they sit at home and study.

\*Kumar also does not like to do homework and learn for tests. He says some boys do homework to impress their parents “so that their parents will think that they are doing well in school and buy them clothes and jewellery and cell phones”. He also believes that “if the boys stay at home, inside their house, the other boys will call you a ‘moffie’”.

\*Osman’s friend has a car. He rides around with his friend after school and during the weekends. He believes that girls are impressed with boys that drive smart cars. Cars play an important role in creating a macho image.

#### 4.4.1 CLUBBING

Many learners at MSS go to clubs during weekends and at the end of the term. The attitude of the parents and the children has not changed after the Throb Nightclub incident in March 2000 where thirteen children died in a stampede. Many of MSS children were in the nightclub that fateful day and were treated for smoke inhalation.

\*Owen said that clubbing is important to impress the girls and your friends. When you tell your friends that “I’ve been to this club and that club, I’ve had this drink and that drink, I smoked this and that, they think you are a ‘top dog’ – the best, they are impressed with you, you’ve done it all and you are still surviving, nothing has happened to you”. This confirms Epstein et al. (1998:105) view that “... The image of the ‘hard man’, who still goes out drinking on a Friday night, remains important...”

\*Mark said that the boys lie to their parents that they are going to sleep at their friends' houses or they are doing a group project and go to clubs. \*Kumar goes to Obsession, a nightclub only at the end of the term with his parents' permission. His friend's uncle owns the club and he goes in free.

Some boys go every Friday and Saturday to Exit, a club in Bayview, Chatsworth. \*Rajen said that the club used to be called Liquid, but it was raided by the police and had a bad reputation. The owners changed the name to Exit. He said that the boys go to have fun. \*Rajen believes that there are a lot of drugs in the nightclub although the bouncers search your wallets, pockets, pants and shoes.

Many boys from MSS also go to Raffles, which is a club in Chatsworth Main, near the school. They play ten-pin bowling and pool while they play they have drinks and 'bites' from a take-away. Virosh said that on the last day of school the place is full. \*Osman said that he and his friends like clubbing. They talk about it all the time. Many girls get drunk and "they don't know what they are doing". Some boys who come without their girlfriends take advantage of these girls.

#### 4.4.2 DRUGS

*"Boys are more into drugs than girls. The school is the biggest market for the drug lords. This definitely has an impact on the boys. They do not focus on their schoolwork and this results in deviant behaviour."* Mr. S. Pillay, Principal of Meadowlands Secondary School. (Refer to Appendix 2) This illustrates the media attention to drug abuse at MSS.

\*Virosh smokes dagga. He believes that dagga is "not a drug, it is a tree of knowledge, it makes you think". He once smoked dagga before an Afrikaans test and "the answers came to him just like that". He feels that the dagga plant is a "pure plant given to us by God, there is nothing wrong with smoking dagga". He also believes that it is "okay to smoke dagga but it is not okay to take other chemicals like mandrax and ecstasy".

\*Osman said that peer pressure forces one to take drugs. Friends tell you to "try

this drug and that drug”. He also believes that dagga is not a drug, “it reflects the person you really are, if you are smart you will do very well”.

\*Rajen, \*Owen, \*Mark and \*Kumar do not do drugs. They believe it is too expensive.

#### 4.4.3 GANGS

Only \*Virosh belonged to a gang. The other boys were aware of gangs in the school but were not members of the gang. \*Rajen said that the gang likes to “smoke, drink, swear a lot and start fights”. He also believes that the “gang members like to stand on other peoples strength and call others to fight their battles. \*Kumar said that the gang likes to “Make the whole school jump” and “Get the school buggered”. \*Virosh said, “no one can touch them”. The boys like to “move in a group” and “put on a show”. The boys like to act “like a big thing”. He believes that if you are in a group “you are strong”. \*Owen said, “If you play dom, you live long, act like a gangster, you die quickly”. \*Owen and \*Rajen were involved in fights. A tribunal was held and they were both suspended for one week.

Sewell (2000: 65) cites a London Magazine *Time Out* (1994), which reports the presence of Asian gangs in Britain. “We hang around the streets because we’ve got nothing better to do. Most of the youths have fallen foul of the police, feel let down by the system and are now living life by their own rules”. bell hooks (2004) describes the live of the ‘street’ that often seduces bright young males. She states that gangster culture is the essence of patriarchal masculinity. Popular culture tells young black males that only the predator will survive.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Connell (1989:301) points out that while “the school is probably not the key influence in the formation of masculinity for most men. Schooling, is nevertheless a powerful influence and in some cases and some situations it is decisive”.

My research concurs with Connell’s statement that the school has a powerful influence on the construction of masculinities. The main aim of this study was to explore how failing grade 11 boys at MSS construct their masculinity. Six Indian boys with ages ranging from seventeen to nineteen were used in this study. The boys were active participants in the research process, in that the main focus was in investigating what they said about themselves and how they constructed their masculinity in and out of school.

The study found that the construction of masculinity has a potent influence on the behaviour and academic performance of boys. All six boys come to MSS to specialize in a trade and all six of them were doing all their subjects on the standard grade. None of them had any intention of furthering their studies at a tertiary institution. In the next section I will discuss my conclusions based on the analysis of my findings

## **5.2 FAILING BOYS: RELATED ASSOCIATED PATTERNS OF MASCULINITY**

### **1. ANTI-SCHOOL**

The boys in this study were bored with school and they showed no interest in their academic performance. They could not cope with the volume of work. The boys preferred bunking class or absconding from school. This resulted in a high rate of absenteeism. They were easily distracted from their schoolwork and preferred pursuing other interests. They did not do their homework or learn for tests and exams. They preferred spending time on the road or in tuck-shops and shopping centers playing games on the machines. They also enjoyed driving around in cars to impress girls. Boys that stayed at home and did their schoolwork were regarded as being feminine. Their lack of interest in their schoolwork impacted negatively on their academic performance.

### **2. ANTI-AUTHORITY**

The boys flout the school rules by not using the proper school uniform. They prefer wearing brand name fashionable jerseys, jackets, pants and shoes. The image they portray is of paramount importance. This is determined by the media, especially TV, and by famous sports stars and pop stars. The boys copied the dressing and the hairstyles of their heroes. They also wear jewellery and carry cell phones knowing that both are not allowed in school.

The boys disobeyed their teachers by being defiant and were disruptive in class. They did not show any respect and courtesy to adults and to their classmates. They did this to gain the attention and approval of their friends and this made them feel strong and masculine.

### 3. ANTI-SOCIAL

The boys were involved in gangs and in school fights. This led to them being suspended. Reed (1999: 98) points out the concern about boy's academic performance with concerns about their social behaviours and social alienation. There is also an increasing identification of certain psychological and physiological syndromes affecting boys and their behaviours in far greater numbers than girls, for example, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. Reed (1999: 98) also introduces the notion that boys are not just 'bad' but 'sad' and the rates of depression and suicide is on the increase.

In a previous study conducted at MSS it was found that Indian boys are the main perpetrators of violence (Hamlall, 2004). Violence is used to threaten, intimidate and maintain dominance over other boys. I did not find any violence by boys on girls, although boys do threaten and intimidate girls.

Holland et al (1998:1) maintain "as young men struggle to produce themselves as masculine, they are driven into the exercise of power over women, but simultaneously exposed to the possibilities of failure". Boys therefore have to defend themselves against vulnerability and adopt strategies to become masculine successfully. This pressures them to use mechanisms to subordinate women. Some of the boys also do drugs.

### 4. GIRLFRIENDS

Having a girlfriend is the trophy that shows proof of heterosexuality. This is of vital importance to boys at MSS. Since there is a larger percentage of boys, there is fierce competition among the boys for the pretty girls. Boys therefore have to impress the girls by wearing brand name clothes, having cell-phones and wearing flashy jewellery. They pressure their parents to buy these expensive commodities on credit.

## 5. RELATIONSHIP TO HIGH ACHIEVERS

A significant finding in this research is that boys associate academic achievement with being feminine and thus being gay. Since none of the boys want to be labelled as gay, boys do not want to be seen to be performing academically. High achievers are labelled with derogatory terms and are ridiculed and the butt of jokes.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educators must ensure that a range of acceptable versions of masculinity are available to boys and help them to negotiate their ways through these alternative and competing masculinities (Kenway and Willis, 1998:129). One way in which to do this is to introduce sport which is sadly lacking at MSS. "School sport isn't just an innocent pastime, but a heavily gendered, masculinising process that builds a 'top dog' model of masculinity to aim for and live up to in many boy's lives"(Salisbury and Jackson: 1996). Connolly (1998), Martino (1999), and Skelton (2000) have also shown how sport, particularly football plays an important part in boys construction of masculinity. Sport could be used to keep the boys gainfully occupied and create heroes on the sports field.

2. Being a trade school, the curriculum content is relevant to most of the boys. However not all boys choose to specialize in a trade. The academic curriculum should include more courses e.g. Art because the curriculum has a powerful influence in shaping boys.

3. The way schools are organized is important. Boys are constantly shaping themselves as they interact with each other. A major problem at MSS is learners not going to relief classes when educators are absent. A number of methods were used to prevent this problem of children loitering. However, the school has not found an effective solution as yet. If this problem is solved, then no child will be out of the class and this will prevent bunking.



4. Having positive role models is significant for boys. A large number of boys come from single parent families and live with their mothers. A mentoring programme should therefore be put into place. Reed (1999: 101) names a school that has already established a mentoring scheme for boys. The boys shadow business people in industry so that the “boys will see what being busy and organized at work really means”.

5. There must be a repositioning of family and state responsibilities. Family poverty is a critical issue and family child welfare and support services are inadequate.

6. A school guidance counselor is urgently needed at MSS. Learners with problems have very little access to help at school.

## APPENDIX 1

### UNIFORM AND GENERAL APPEARANCE

Wherever we go, we leave an impression of ourselves. 85% of this image is formed visually i.e. what people see when they look at us. It is therefore very important to create a good impression by looking good, especially in our school uniform. Parents and the general public judge the school by the way we look in our uniforms. It is essential to wear the uniform correctly and with pride.

#### Dress Code for Girls

- ❖ Dress : White school dress – length on the knee or below. White cotton pants may be worn together with the dress (no wide bottoms)
- ❖ Blazer / jersey : Only navy blue jersey or navy blue blazers are allowed. Navy blue rain jackets or anoraks will be permitted on rainy days only.
- ❖ Shoe : Black leather school shoes.
- ❖ Socks : Plain white socks / anklets. Ordinary flesh coloured stockings are allowed in winter – June / July / August.
- ❖ Ties / Monogram : Official school tie and monogram. Available at school.
- ❖ Belt : Maroon belt – no studs.
- ❖ Hair : Short hair – just above the collar. Hair below the shoulder length must be tied back or plaited away from the face. No fancy hairstyles or tints. No scrunches or grips. Only black hair bands / slides are permitted. White ribbons can be used. No gel, oil, or lotion. Learners infringing this stipulation will be sent home immediately.
- ❖ Make-up : Nails must be short and well kept. Colourless nail polish and colourless hardener may be used. Face make-up is not permitted. Only clear contact lens will be allowed.
- ❖ Jewellery : Only gold and silver stud earrings and watches are allowed. No double earrings loop earrings and colourful studs allowed. No rings, hand chains, ankle chains, neck chains, fancy earrings, nose rings, bangles, wrist bands, etc.
- ❖ Student card : To be worn at all times, clipped to the tie.

#### Dress Code for Boys

- ❖ Trousers : Regulation school grey long pants. No other shade of grey such as collies, chinos, denim, etc.
- ❖ Shirt : Plain white school shirt with collar. No T-shirts, skippers, and shirts with emblems and prints. The shirt is to be tucked into the pants and not under the belt.
- ❖ Blazer / jersey : Only navy blue jersey or navy blue blazers are allowed. Navy blue rain jackets or anoraks will be permitted on rainy days only.
- ❖ Shoe : Black leather school shoes.
- ❖ Socks : Plain white or grey. No secret socks.
- ❖ Ties Monogram : Official school tie and monogram. Available at school.
- ❖ Belt : Plain black – no studs.
- ❖ Hair : Short, neat and off the collar eyebrows and ears. Exotic hairstyles and tinting are not permitted. No wedge and long side burns. No gel, oil cream or lotion. Must be clean shaven. Learners infringing this stipulation will be sent home immediately.
- ❖ Jewellery : Only watches are allowed. No rings, wrist bands, earrings, neck chains ankle chains etc.
- ❖ Student card : To be worn at all times, clipped to the tie.



# Pupil found with dagga

**Ashini Padayachee**

A 17-year-old was arrested after being caught with 40 grams of marijuana on his possession. The Meadowlands pupil was caught after the principal got the smell of the dagga smoke from behind the caretaker's building, on Friday according to Cpt Edmund Singh.

This is the third case where children

have been involved with drugs in two weeks. It is not about how much or how little drugs were found but that Chatsworth has become a breeding ground for children involved in criminal activities.

The problem is partly because of the complacency of parents. Teachers are saying there is undue criticism directed at them to address the situa-

tion of drug abuse," said Cpt Singh. He added parents should take more responsibility for their children as their general complacency was partly to blame for the number of children involved in drug abuse.

"All relevant role players need to take their gloves off, in a sense that they need to get involved by taking a more active interest in their children's lives.

Principals are tired of being dictated to by parents. They can't be held responsible. The community needs to support our initiatives to curb these activities. There are structures in place to deal with these things. It begins with education," said Cpt Singh.

## POSSESSION

The boy is being charged for possession of marijuana

and will most probably be released into his parent's custody.

"The consequence of an act like this doesn't register in the minds of these children. If they are convicted of the crime or pay an admission of guilt fine, it goes into their criminal record. It does not get expunged after a few years. It will be to their detriment as their future can be

jeopardised.

Having a criminal record can hamper getting a bank loan, your tertiary educa-

tion, application for gun license, almost everything. There is no escaping it," warned Cpt Singh.

**APPENDIX 2**

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